

The Myth of Zurvan Cosmogony and Eschatology¹

The status and social structure of the Zoroastrian church and religion during the Sasanian period are something of a puzzle. This statement may sound paradoxical. The Sasanian period is one of the best-documented epochs in Iranian religious history, and it may seem strange that there should be any uncertainty about such a prominent issue related to it. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a central aspect of Sasanian culture and society – its official religion – is clouded by ambiguities.

To present the main problem in simple terms: We know from a variety of foreign sources that a very widespread form of belief in that period adhered to the myth of Zurvan. According to that myth the God of Time, Zurvan, was the parent of twin brothers, Ohrmazd, the creator of the world, and Ahreman, the Destructive Spirit. The local Iranian sources, however, seem to know nothing of the myth; this applies both to contemporary inscriptions on stone, and to theological and exegetical compositions (surviving in most cases in books written in the Islamic period). We are thus left with the need to decide the reason for this discrepancy. This could be done in one of two ways. One may resolve the difficulty by discrediting the foreign reports, a procedure which is hardly warranted in view of the fact that these reports are both numerous and independent of each other, and that many of them are authentic compositions of the Sasanian period, often written within the domain of Sasanian rule. Another procedure would be to assume that the indigenous literature is consciously selective in its presentation of the religious ideas of the period. Put in other words, this explanation implies that systematic editorial censorship caused all references to Zurvan's position as parent of the two major spirit to be deliberately deleted from the books. I shall

¹ This article was essentially written in 1985. References to studies published in the intervening years are not complete. I am glad to dedicate it to David Flusser in token of my admiration and affection.

try here to present the point of view that neither of these two approaches is acceptable, and that a third way is available which seems to make better sense.

Other problems arise as a result of the discrepancy between the information culled from indigenous sources and that which may be gained from foreign accounts. As a rule the Zurvan myth is all but totally ignored in the indigenous sources, while in the foreign accounts it looms much larger than the form of Zoroastrianism which we are in the habit of regarding as orthodox. Should we conclude from this discrepancy that faith in the myth of Zurvan as the god who engendered both antagonistic spirits was a major heresy in the Sasanian period? Was it perhaps the main form of religion in that period, a form banished and stamped out of existence by the survivors of that religion after the Arab conquest of Iran? Or should we, alternatively, regard it as of minor consequence and importance, a fairy tale told only to foreign observers, but by no means generally admitted? Again, we shall try in what follows to present a third approach to this problem.

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The best and most succinct formulation of what is probably nowadays the most commonly accepted scholarly opinion on the question of Zurvanism may be found in a recently published book by Professor Mary Boyce, the foremost historian of Zoroastrianism. One cannot do better than quote this short passage in full:

[Zurvanism] is the only considerable Zoroastrian heresy, evolved probably by Persian magi in the late fifth century B. C. It was a monism, based on a new exegesis of Y. 30, whereby Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu were seen as twin sons of Time, Zurvan (a minor divinity of late Younger Avestan texts). The earliest reference to it, by the Greek historian Theopompus, shows it linked with a special version of the 'world year'. The heresy was, it seems, adopted as the true orthodoxy by the late Achaemenian kings, and was adhered to by their Persian successors, the Sasanians; but its teachings have nevertheless to be pieced together from scattered sources. Because the Zurvanites regarded Ahura Mazda as Creator of all things good, under the remote Zurvan, they were able to worship together with the orthodox in full orthopraxy, using the same liturgies; and this seems to have prevented serious schism. The heresy disappears after the tenth century A. C.²

Professor Boyce's words reflect and summarize a line of thinking and scholarly investigation into the problem of Zurvanism which has extended over a period of several decades, and to which many prominent scholars in the Iranian field have contributed³. Zaehner, in his extensive work on this

² BOYCE 1984: 96.

³ The following scholars who contributed to this discussion up to the Second World War may be noted: SPIEGEL (1873: 184-187), BLUE (1925), CHRISTENSEN (1928: 45-59; 1944:

subject⁴, took it up again for thorough consideration, completing and adding to the conjectures of his predecessors. It must, however, be said that it was not infrequently Zaehner's tendency to be carried away by far-fetched speculations, and that his textual editions and translations, although generally acceptable, are not always flawless. His work has had the merit of reopening the discussion of this question, and the fifties and sixties were indeed a period in which a great deal of fresh thinking was done about the questions connected with Zurvanism⁵.

It is the purpose of the present article to take up the question again, and to try to examine the sources in order to establish whether the presentation of Zurvanism as a "considerable Zoroastrian heresy", a characterization which had already been put in doubt by a number of scholars in the past⁶, is indeed tenable.

We may begin our discussion with some comments on the passage quoted from Professor Boyce's book. It must be remarked that her use of the term "heresy" calls for reservation. Heresy, it must be recalled, is not an absolute term, and cannot be determined by a historian of religion by his simply adopting the point of view of either the founder or of the present-day adherents of the religion under discussion, nor can it be defined as a deviation from a religious norm favoured by the scholar. Heresy can possess no meaning except in relation to orthodoxy, but orthodoxy itself acquires its meaning only from its position within the society or the religious community. In other words, we cannot speak of orthodoxy except as a

59 ff.), NYBERG (1929; 1931; 1938: 380 ff.), SCHAEFER (in REITZENSTEIN and SCHAEFER 1926; SCHAEFER 1941), BENVENISTE (1929a; 1929b; 1932), and VON WESSENDONK (1933: 261 ff.).

⁴ ZAEHNER's work, begun with a series of articles (1937/39, 1940/42), was continued in his book *Zurvan* (1955a), and a supplementary article (1955b). He summarised and amplified his views in his more general book *The dawn and twilight of Zoroastrianism* (1963).

⁵ One should note in particular DUCHESNE-GUILLEMIN (1956; 1962), BOYCE (1957, and more recently 1990), and FRYE (1959). Two individual notes of scepticism have been heard, from two different points of view. One was from MOLÉ (1959; 1961; as well as 1963: 8 ff., 28 ff.), and the other from BIANCHI (1958). The line of discussion begun by Nyberg was pursued and pushed to an extreme by some members of the Scandinavian school, notably WIDENGREN (1938: 266 ff.; 1955; 1965), WIKANDER (1946: 177 ff.), and HARTMAN (1953: 97 ff.). GNOLI (1984) referred to Zurvanism as "the second phase of Iranian dualism", although it is not entirely clear from Gnoli's presentation how he fits the historical data regarding Zurvanism into his conception of the development of Iranian dualism. Where does the dualism of the Pahlavi books come in, e.g. in his table on p. 136? Does he regard it as a different phase of that development?

⁶ Notably SPIEGEL 1873; SCHAEFER (in REITZENSTEIN and SCHAEFER 1926: 239); BIDEZ and CUMONT (1938 I: 63), BIANCHI 1958; and MOLÉ 1959. A sceptical attitude is voiced also by FRYE 1984: 321 n. 97, and ASMUSSEN 1983: 939 (although on p. 941 he seems to accept Zaehner's view that there was antagonism between the orthodox and the Zurvanites).

term describing the accepted form of religion in a given period, whether it be accepted by a majority of adherents, by the social or religious establishment, or at least by a group of people who have a particular prestige. Professor Boyce, however, seems to judge as heresy any deviation from what is acceptable to her as normative for Zoroastrianism.

Is it logical to say that this heresy "was adopted as the true orthodoxy by the late Achaemenian kings"? Such a statement seems to be based on the assumption that even if a religious community, with its recognized leaders, opts for a certain form of religion, that form may still be labelled a heresy merely because it is at variance with what the scholar considers to be orthodoxy. The problem becomes even more acute when we remember that Professor Boyce regards Zurvanism as the form of religion which was dominant throughout the Sasanian period⁷. Are we then entitled to declare that throughout one of the most significant periods in Zoroastrian history the commonly held belief, i.e. the orthodoxy of the time, was in fact a heresy? Surely this would be a statement which strips our terminology bare of any sense, and which is in danger of falling into the trap of using an arbitrary system of values for judging historical phenomena. It is clearly advisable to avoid using this term except as reflecting the judgement of a specific individual or group in the society under discussion; it should not be used as a term we as scholars regard as applicable⁸.

The proper use of the terms "orthodoxy" and "heresy", important as it is, is not, however, the aim of our discussion. Professor Boyce's presentation, and in this she represents a widely held view, implies essentially that there was an established school of thought, an organized group or movement, which upheld the supremacy of Zurvan. This movement stood in opposition to orthodox Zoroastrianism, which regarded Ahura Mazda and Angra Manyu as the only two cosmological and religious principles. It should be our task to try to find out whether such a model is applicable to Iranian religious history. It would be advisable to confine our discussion to the Sasanian and early Islamic period, which is the only one for which we possess sufficient documentation from a variety of complementary sources, and in which faith in Zurvan as high god is unequivocally attested. Any insights gained from this analysis may help us in reconstructing the earlier history of the Zoroastrian religion.

⁷ Cf. BOYCE 1957; 1979: 112ff., 118ff. The chapter heading for this last section is "Upholding a Zurvanite orthodoxy", where the relative value of these notions is implicitly recognized, although in the body of the chapter Zurvanism is still called a heresy.

⁸ Professor Boyce goes so far as to apply the term "heresy" to modern European interpretations of Zoroastrianism; cf. BOYCE 1982: 233 n.; 1979: 194f., 197, 201ff.

Once the existence of Zurvanism as a complete and independent religious system is established for the Sasanian period, even in the mild version suggested by Professor Boyce, namely, a heterodoxy that did not advocate heteropraxy at the same time⁹, it should be possible to discuss whether the arguments used by Benveniste¹⁰ and Boyce¹¹ for proving the antiquity of Zurvanism are convincing. These arguments are based on Plutarch's description of the Iranian religion. Benveniste suggested that this description, attributed by Plutarch to Theopompus, represents the Zurvanite, rather than any other form of the Iranian religion, but this hypothesis has not gained wide acceptance¹². Another piece of evidence for the antiquity of Zurvanism in Iran is found, according to several scholars, in the famous inscription of Antiochus I of Commagene (69-c. 31 B.C.E.)¹³. There we seem to have evidence for the recognition of Unlimited Time¹⁴ as a central power in the destinies of humanity. This is hardly evidence for the presence of a Zurvanite religion, for the concept of Unlimited Time is present also in the Avesta, and must have been widespread in Iranian culture. Another hint to its presence is found in the echo we have of the twin concept of time in the Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) apocryphal writing, the Slavonic Book of

⁹ This explanation of Zurvanism (first suggested by FRYE 1959, and accepted by DUCHESNE-GUILLEMIN 1962 and BOYCE 1984), which posits a Zurvanite church without a distinctive body of practice, tends to make the whole notion of a separate Zurvanite church rather questionable, for analogies to this kind of religious organisation, which is devoid of distinctive ritual, are not easy to find. Benveniste's idea of Zurvanism as a religion associated with demon worship would make better sense if one sought to reconstruct a purely theoretical possibility, without regard for historical evidence.

¹⁰ BENVENISTE 1929: 69ff.

¹¹ BOYCE 1984: 96.

¹² This interpretation of the text of Plutarch was rejected, rightly to my mind, by CHRISTENSEN 1931: 29-34; NYBERG 1931: 223, 234; BIDEZ and CUMONT 1938 I: 65f.; SCHAEFER 1941: 273f. Another attempt at treating Zurvanism as an ancient belief in Iran was made by GHIRSHMAN 1958, using a pictorial representation of one of the bronzes of Luristan as evidence. It is, however, clear that an interpretation of a pictorial motif, which by the nature of things can be interpreted in more than one way, should depend on a relevant text, which in this case is totally lacking. See now BOYCE 1990: 21, who rightly, to my mind, rejects Ghirshman's hypothesis, but uses the following argument, which I find hard to accept: "That Iranians should have chosen to make representations of their own gods at so early a date appears unlikely." It is true that ancient Iran has yielded very little in the way of divine iconography, but an a priori rejection of any inclination on the Iranian part to do so strikes me as too sweeping.

¹³ The inscription has often been discussed in scholarly literature. One of the most illuminating of these discussions is SCHAEFER's (1927: 138ff.). There is a thorough recent analysis of the problems by BOYCE (1990: 24, with further references in n. 45), where a different stand is taken on the issues.

¹⁴ It is not clear whether this is conceived as a personal deity or as an abstraction; but if the inscription is imbued, as it seems to be, with Iranian spirit, the distinction is quite irrelevant, for the passage from one mode of reference to the other would be easy.

Enoch. There, it has been pointed out¹⁵, a distinction is made between "the great Aion", eternal time, and "the Aion of creation", time divided into "times and hours"¹⁶, which is the time of the created world. This is strikingly similar to the Zoroastrian conception of time, and serves in the Slavonic Enoch, as in Zoroastrianism, to explain the workings of both the creation of the world and its end. Despite the prominence of time here, there is no hint of what we may call Zurvanism.

Our first concern should, however, be to examine the evidence for Sasanian Zurvanism in order to determine whether it has historical validity in the sense that it was an organized body of religion. The evidence for Zurvanism rests on three groups of material:

(a) Reports in Greek, Armenian and Syriac sources of the Sasanian period, unequivocally available only from the end of the fourth century C.E. onwards¹⁷, according to which the Persian myth of creation started with Zurvan, a deity that existed before anything else, and from whose sacrifice and the doubt about its outcome arose respectively the god Ohrmazd and the devil Ahreman. These reports are fortified by a number of incidental references in Syriac hagiographies and doctrinal compositions which show clearly that Zurvan was considered by these foreign authors to be the high god of Iran¹⁸.

(b) Manichaean texts in Middle Persian, which, although they do not report directly about the faith of the Zoroastrians (except in one or two cases)¹⁹ show, by the use they make of the name Zurvan for rendering their own high god, the Father of Greatness, that in Mani's period Zurvan was considered a supreme deity in Iran. The fact that Zurvan holds this position only in the Middle Persian and not in the Parthian or Sogdian texts may support the idea that faith in Zurvan as supreme god was held in certain areas only, namely, those in which Persian was the current language²⁰.

(c) Post-Sasanian reports in Arabic and Persian sources. This class of material raises some peculiar problems. It must not necessarily be assumed that what the Islamic authors report concerning the religion of the Majūs is based on direct observation and oral interrogation. In other words, we should not necessarily assume that they report

¹⁵ PINES 1970.

¹⁶ Slavonic Enoch, short recension, Ch. 17; ed. VAILLANT, p. 60 ff. Quoted and discussed PINES 1970: 77 f.

¹⁷ The earliest being by Theodore of Mopsuestia, quoted by Photius, *Bibliotheca* 81 (for which cf. CLEMEN 1920: 108; BIDEZ and CUMONT 1938 II: 87; CHRISTENSEN 1944: 150; ZAEHNER 1955: 445). The Manichaean fragment published by HENNING 1951: 50 n. 1, may be earlier than Theodore of Mopsuestia, but its relevance to Zurvanism is not established beyond question. See further on this in the following discussion.

¹⁸ An important passage of this kind is the one from Mar Bar-hadhbshabba, discussed by BENVENISTE (1932/3) and BIDEZ and CUMONT (1938 II: 100 f.; cf. also ZAEHNER 1955: 439 f.; reproduced in BOYCE 1984: 98). All the material is given in CHRISTENSEN 1928: 47–54; BIDEZ and CUMONT 1938 II: 63 ff.; ZAEHNER 1955a. A survey of the material is in SCHAEFER 1941: 278 f.

¹⁹ Cf. the Middle Persian Manichaean fragment M28, published by HENNING 1951: 50 n. 1 (partly reproduced by ZAEHNER 1955a: 439), as well as the Turkish text T II D 178; the relevant passage is reprinted in ZAEHNER 1955a: 432. Cf. also ASMUSSEN 1965: 168 f., 194.

²⁰ This was suggested by BOYCE 1957.

on the state of the Zoroastrian religion in their own time. Some of the Arabic reports may well derive from written documents going back to the Sasanian period, and it is impossible to distinguish contemporary accounts from those of Sasanian origin. We may note in passing that the Pahlavi literature, which we inevitably use for reconstructing ideas of the Sasanian period, and which we sometimes quote as evidence for earlier layers of the Zoroastrian religion, was mostly composed in a period which is not much earlier than that of the main classical accounts in Arabic.

Apart from the question as to the source and chronology of the information contained in the Arabic books, we must also be aware of the problem that these writers do not report on things from inside the tradition to which they refer, for they report on the Iranian religion from the point of view of an alien religion, and often incorporate critical comments on the beliefs of the Persians. In this they are not much different from the Christian writers of the Sasanian period who wrote in Armenian and Syriac. In some ways, however, they may be in a better position to serve as reliable witnesses. Their writings often derive, as can be shown, from authentic Zoroastrian sources. In addition, it should be observed that the Islamic writers in Arabic and Persian were often themselves of Persian origin, and may be assumed to have been quite close to the Zoroastrian traditions by virtue of their original environment, and sometimes their own upbringing. Examples of such background affinity with the Persian material are provided by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (whom one may suppose to be the source of some of the information contained in the later books)²¹, al-Bīrūnī, 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Shahrastānī and others.

Another argument in favour of these Arabic reports is the fact that the Islamic literary and scholarly tradition developed a style of objective reporting, in which wide erudition and accurate knowledge were considered great virtues. Even theologians who set out to debate the tenets of the Zoroastrian faith in virulent terms regarded it as their duty to start off by reporting the views of their opponents with a fair degree of precision and completeness²².

One interesting fact should be mentioned. Although the authors of Arabic books on the opinions of the sects are among those who report on the Zurvanite myth, and some, like Shahrastānī, create the impression that this myth may have been connected to a group called "Zurwāniyya", the historical information conveyed by the totality of Islamic literature is that there were only two major deviant movements in Iran during the Sasanian period, namely, those connected with the names Mani and Mazdak. It so

²¹ For my views on Ibn al-Muqaffa's background see SHAKED 1982.

²² For a survey and evaluation of the Arabic material cf. CHRISTENSEN 1944: 59 ff.; NYBERG 1958; BOSWORTH 1983.

happens that these two movements are not only described as two religious movements, with full details about faith and practice, but their reality is confirmed by a variety of complementary sources²³. This is absolutely and conspicuously absent in the case of Zurvanism: there is no reference whatsoever to a historical sect called Zurvanism, and no details about its founder or about events connected with its existence, as we have with regard to Manichaeism or Mazdakism.

We have already stressed the fact that one source of information is conspicuous by its almost total absence: Zoroastrian literature. We may look in vain in the Pahlavi writings for the term "Zurvanism", or for any allusion to a belief in Zurvan as supreme god. No reference of this kind will be found anywhere. It is instructive to read Zaehner's book on Zurvan, with its wealth of quotations, and to find no quotation from Pahlavi which refers, whether approvingly or disapprovingly, to the Zurvanite faith, apart from a single quotation in *Dēnkard* VIII which condemns the idea that Ohrmazd and Ahreman were brothers²⁴. This idea occurs in the myth of Zurvan, but is not necessarily restricted to it, as we shall try to show further on. Zaehner, it must be said, was not discouraged by this absence of explicit evidence. Following in the footsteps of Nyberg, he valiantly set out to declare that a large portion of Pahlavi literature is nothing but Zurvanism in disguise. The fact that no explicit reference to Zurvanism or to any of its acknowledged elements occurs in the Pahlavi writings was circumvented by enlarging considerably the definition of Zurvanism and by selecting various criteria other than clear references to Zurvan as constituting evidence for the presence of Zurvanite ideas. Thus, for example, since Zurvan is associated with fate, any reference to the prominence of fate is automatically considered Zurvanite; since Zurvanism is deemed to be anti-woman (because the creation myth in which the Primal Whore Jeh²⁵ figures has been pronounced, on the basis of questionable evidence, to be Zurvanite), negative references to women are also considered to be Zurvanite²⁶. As a consequence, the whole text is most often relegated to the realm of Zurvanism²⁷. We shall come back to these questions at a later stage in this

²³ A discussion of Mazdak, which casts doubts on his historical existence, is to be found in GAUBE 1982. The reality of the movement need not be put in doubt, although there is some confusion as to the identity of its founder. Cf. the recent and thorough presentation by YARSHATER 1983.

²⁴ *DkM* 829, given with earlier bibliography by ZAEHNER 1955a: 429f. Cf. especially SCHAEDE 1930: 288f.; BENVENISTE 1932/3: 209.

²⁵ Cf. BENVENISTE 1932/3; WIDENGREN 1967b.

²⁶ Cf. BENVENISTE 1932/3: 187ff.

²⁷ As an example of a liberal use of such a procedure we may quote HARTMAN 1953: 14. According to him, Y. 65:11 is Zurvanite because it contains the epithet *daregō.xvadāta-*

discussion, but it must be stressed that the procedure employed by Zaehner and Widengren, besides using circular arguments, leaves hardly any room for the expression of what may be termed "orthodox" Zoroastrianism, and one wonders in that case where the distinction between Zurvanism and Zoroastrianism would be found. One wonders, in the face of such pan-Zurvanism, when and how "orthodoxy" started to assert itself. Thus, for example, it is by no means clear what the "orthodox" conception of women in the story of creation would be, when all disparaging implications are considered to be of Zurvanite origin. "Orthodox" Zoroastrianism, stripped bare of its "Zurvanite" features, would emerge as a rather puritanical philosophy, having a consistently high regard for women and extolling individual responsibility which is in no way limited by fate or predestination. Such a view of Zoroastrianism seems, however, too one-sided and selective, and presents a picture of a religion which smacks of modern rationalism, and which is not readily credible in historical terms. Needless to say, in such a case we would have no evidence for the expression of orthodoxy, according to the narrow definition which emerges from this.

To come back to our main point: If, in Professor Boyce's words, Zurvanism was the major heresy of Zoroastrianism, how is it possible to explain the fact that orthodox Zoroastrian writers did not deem it necessary to dedicate more than a single line of polemic to it? It must be emphasized that generally the Zoroastrian writers were by no means reticent about their opposition to other forms of religion. The third book of the *Dēnkard* is full of chapters dedicated to controversy, which are often formulated in very strong terms. The opponents are referred to by a variety of terms: *ahlamôg*, *zandīg*, *agdên*²⁸, *sâstâr*, *dêw-yasn*, and other derogatory designations. Some of the antagonists at whom these polemics are directed are explicitly named, while others are defined only as holders of particular views; among those named are Jews and Christians, Manichaeans and Mazdakites, but none of those names, and none of the views attributed to the unnamed sectarians, conforms to anything which we may identify as Zurvanite, not even according to the loose and wide definitions mentioned above. Much the same is true of the polemics contained in other Zoroastrian books, notably the major work of apologetics and polemics, *Shkand Gumânig Wizâr*. This striking fact, viz. the absence of references to Zurvanites as the objects of religious or theological polemics, cannot be brushed aside lightly.

applied to Vayu. This is an epithet employed in Y. 65:8 with regard to Zurvan. "Par conséquent", Hartman concludes, "ce texte a un caractère zurvanite".

²⁸ A discussion of these terms will be found in SCHAEDE 1930: 274ff.; ZAEHNER 1955b: 234ff.; SHAKED 1969: 187ff. For the term *zandik* cf. MOLÉ 1961: 14ff.

The argument used or implied, namely that passages reflecting Zurvanite views were struck out by some kind of censor, does not apply here. It was the universal practice of the period, in Jewish, Christian and pagan, as well as Zoroastrian and Manichaean texts, to quote at length from the writings of religious adversaries in order to refute their ideas. This Zoroastrian reticence with regard to Zurvanism can have only one explanation: that Zurvanism as an organized religious system is a scholarly invention which lacks historical substance.

The same conclusion may be drawn from another rather surprising fact. The name of the god Zurvan occurs often enough in Zoroastrian texts, both in the Avesta and in Pahlavi. If any cult or faith which was considered dangerously heretic had been associated with his name, one should have expected some note of caution, some warning, to be attached to this name, perhaps to the effect that Zurvan may indeed be worshipped and adored, but not in the manner in which this is done by certain people, who abuse his name and make a travesty of the Zoroastrian religion. Again, nothing like this is found anywhere. One has no sense of either the name or the person of Zurvan being associated with any tension or conflict, something one might expect had Zurvanism been as dangerous a heresy as it is made out to be.

One further piece of evidence should be mentioned. There is a composition in New Persian which professes faith in Zurvan as the deity who preceded both Ohrmazd and Ahreman. The composition I am referring to is the Zoroastrian book known as *'Ulamâ'-i Islâm II*²⁹. The remarkable thing

²⁹ Printed in several places; cf. *Persian Rivayat II*: 80ff. Translation and bibliographical data are given in ZAEHNER 1955a: 409ff. More recent discussion of the text is in BIANCHI 1958: 165ff.; 1977. It should be noted that the first *'Ulamâ'-i Islâm* also contains phrases that may be regarded as Zurvanite. Let us quote a passage from this composition:

Know that the Creator is one and His religion is one. Neither the Creator nor His religion shall expire. The way is one, waylessness is several. The Creator is one, seekers are many. Each party [*1] invokes (the Creator) in a different fashion. First I shall discourse of the Behdîns (i.e. the upholders of the Good religion). The Zoroastrians [*2] recognize Yazdân as great; some call him by several names. "Creator" is the true (name) [*3] in the religion.

If Yazdân and all the Amahraspands with all the people of the world came together, they would not be able to bring into being a single grain of millet without Time (*bi zamâna*), for it comes into being in time (*barûzgâr*). We have written "time" (*rûzgâr*) for this reason, namely because many people do not know that time (*rûzgâr*) is Time (*zamân*). It is possible to learn the religion by time (*ba-rûzgâr*), it is possible to learn a trade by time, it is possible to learn good manners (*adab*) by time, it is possible to cultivate a vineyard and a field by time, a tree grows by time and gives fruit by time, it is possible to make a craft by time, and the existence [*4] of every thing is repaired by time. One cannot say that there was a Creator when there was no time. If any one says that the work of time (*rûzgâr*) is night-and-day, it should be known that there was much when night-and-day was not, while Time (*zamân*) was.

about it is not that it regards Zurvan as a primordial deity, but that it has entered the collections of Zoroastrian literature without causing any stir: it was evidently not considered by the writers and compilers of Zoroastrian literature to be a piece of writing which should be banned or hidden. It occurs in the manuscripts without any editorial comments, reservations or apologies. Again, there is no indication of religious strife being associated with Zurvan's name.

In the two treatises which go under the name of *'Ulamâ'-i Islâm*, and in other Zoroastrian writings, the tendency to accord precedence to time, not as a personal god, but as a concept, is apparent. This can hardly be regarded as a monotheistic tendency in Zoroastrianism. Time is a neutral and undifferentiated entity, and even as late as the late Sasanian period it seems to have been an accepted variant within the range of Zoroastrian religious thinking that the dualism of Ohrmazd and Ahreman was preceded by undifferentiated time. The Sasanian story of Zurvan is evidently a mythologized and personalized version of the same type of thinking. Although it is possible that this time speculation was secondarily associated with the Gathic verse Y 30:3, where the two spirits are called "twins", in order to attach this idea to the sacred text, the discussion of Zurvan, both as a myth and a theological speculation, indicates that the conception of Zurvan as originator of the two spirits had in all likelihood an origin different from Y 30:3. In other words, it seems possible to conclude from the style and formulation of the various surviving fragments that there was a current of thinking that tried to explain the origin of dualism against a background of undifferentiated and impersonal time, and that this explanation was popularly translated in the myth of Zurvan into the scene of the deity that sought a son and had instead a son and a non-son through an accident. That the mythical story is late and derivative is also suggested by the echoes of other cultures which seem to have made their impact on the shaping of this story. The similarity of the story on the one hand to the Upanishads, where

As for Ahreman, some people call him by name and recognize evil to be from him. He cannot do any thing without Time (*zamân*). It is a strange thing that by this deed you should become [*5] evil-doers, and it is not proper that you should call [*6] him (i.e. Time?) an evil-doer [*7]. It is even more strange that there should be such a command for you to do evil, and that the reward [*8] for the evil which you do should be punishment and torture to the soul before [*9] the resurrection (*Darab Hormazyar's Rivayat*, II: 75, lines 15ff.; cf. DHABHAR 1932: 443f.).

Notes to the translation: *1. MS has *kwby*; read *grwhy*. *2. MS has *mrzrtsty'n*, which seems like a cross between *mazdayasnân* and *zardushtiyân*. *3. Literally "the truth" (*haqq*). *4. MS has *vdr vjvd*, for which read *vvjvd*. *5. MS has *myb'snd*, for which read *mibâshid*. *6. MS has *xv'nnd*, for which read *xwânid*. *7. MS has *yd krd'r*. *8. MS has *svy*, read *thavâb*? *9. MS has *vpys*, read *pêsh*.

a plurality is born out of the *âtman* or Brahman³⁰, and on the other to the biblical story of Isaac and his twin sons, representing good and evil³¹, is quite striking and can hardly be fortuitous.

Time as well as space is fairly widely attested in reports about Zoroastrianism and in the original Zoroastrian texts³². Together they constitute the two basic notions out of which the structure of the cosmos comes into being by the work of creation, and they are perhaps also the two basic concepts out of which the differentiation into good and evil, into the two divine beings, comes about. The earliest reference to this idea is found in the report given by Damascius (late fifth – early sixth century C.E.) on the authority of Eudemos of Rhodes, Aristotle's pupil. According to this report, there are among the Magians "some" who "call the whole of that which is Intelligible and Unique Place, while others call it Time. From this there is made the distinction either between a good god and an evil demon, or between light and darkness." The same source has the Magians placing at the head of one group of elements Oromazdes, and at the head of the other, Areimanios³³.

As Bidez and Cumont³⁴ already pointed out, attributing to the Iranian religion use of the term "place" as a designation for the substratum which preceded creation is not far-fetched in terms of Zoroastrian literature. As a parallel to Zurvan, who represents Time, we find references in several places in the Avesta to Thwâsha, the deity of Space³⁵. But the basic equivalent of the idea contained in Damascius' report is presented through use of terms such as Way, *gâh*, *gyâg*, which figure in the first chapter of the *Bundahishn*, which is devoted to cosmogony³⁶.

³⁰ For a plurality born out of thought, cf. especially Brihadâranyaka Upanishad 1:4.

³¹ Gen. 25:21 ff.

³² As an example of the occurrence of these two concepts as primordial entities cf. *SGV XVI: 54 thihi u jamân*. ZAEHNER 1955a: 388 reads in *DkM* 567 *zamân, gâs* ... "Time, Space ...", but the reading is unacceptable; see SHAKED 1982: 199. On Middle Persian Way and other terms see further below. The terms *zamân* and *gyâg* occur also among the notions which were discussed by the writings brought together by Shâpûr I in the account of *DkM* 412: 17 ff.

³³ Damascius, *Dubitationes et solutiones*, ed. RUELLE, 125bis. Cf. CLEMEN 1920: 95; BIDEZ and CUMONT 1938 II: 69f. n. 15; I: 62f.; ZAEHNER 1955a: 20, 447 (text G1). SCHAEDEER 1941: 273, regards this as the oldest witness for Zurvanism.

³⁴ 1939 I: 62 n. 4.

³⁵ The theme is discussed and developed by ZAEHNER 1955a: 89.

³⁶ Cf. ZAEHNER 1955a: 88 ff. My understanding of the *GBd* text which deals with Way is given in SHAKED 1980: 19, 29 f. It may be remarked that SPIEGEL 1873: 189 f. suggests that in the description of Herodotus I: 131, where he speaks of the veneration by the Persians of Zeus, identified with the whole vault of the sky, Zeus should not be understood as a rendering of Ahura Mazda, since that deity is never identified with the sky, but rather as an equivalent of Thwâsha, the god of space. An echo of the twin concepts of Time and

It seems that from the preceding discussion we may draw the conclusion that ideas of Time existing at the basis of the cosmos and even at the roots, of the division into good and evil were known and current in Zoroastrianism, with Time sometimes being supplemented by the notion of Space or Place. These notions, although they bear a theoretical resemblance to what has been called Zurvanism, were apparently not considered deviant in any way, and we find them in Zoroastrian writings without a hint of reservation, just as they are found in the reports of foreign observers like Eudemos of Rhodes³⁷. On the other hand, the myth of Zurvan, in its straightforward formulation (as opposed to the philosophical ideas about the special position of Time and Space), is never found in Iranian sources.

There is thus a clear discrepancy between the information which may be gained from the bulk of the extant Zoroastrian literature and that presented to us by the majority of the Greek, Armenian, Syriac and Arabic writers reporting about the Sasanian period, a discrepancy which has caused Zurvanism to be labelled "a Zoroastrian dilemma". The discrepancy results from the fact that while in the Zoroastrian writings Zurvan merely precedes creation, constitutes the substratum or framework within which the creation took place³⁸, or sometimes as that which preceded the two entities or coexisted with them, in the foreign reports we often come across

Space occurs in a passage of Mas'ûdi, *Tanbih*, 93 and Ibn Hazm, *Fîṣal*, I: 35. This passage was discussed by ZAEHNER 1955a: 210 f.; STERN 1970: 413 ff.; SHAKI 1970: 289. The passage speaks of a pentad of entities that are eternally pre-existent. The list is: Ohrmazd, meaning God; Ahreman, meaning Satan; *k'h*, meaning Time; *j'm*, meaning Place; and *ywm*, meaning *al-ṭīna wa-l-khamīra* "clay and dough". Using the observations of Stern and Shaki, the last three terms are probably to be read *gâh*, **jây* and *tô(h)m* respectively (Shaki's explanation of the last term seems convincing).

³⁷ A very telling passage in the *Persian Rivayat* of Darab Hormazyar may be quoted:

Ohrmazd and Ahreman became manifest from Time (*zamâna*). That is to say, Ohrmazd and Ahreman became manifest in one period. But Ohrmazd became manifest of his own self in his bounty. There is no doubt concerning this. Further, Zoroaster asked Ohrmazd, "When this world came into existence, what was there?" Ohrmazd replied, "At that time the two of us were there, I and Ahunavar."

Zurvan is called Ahunavar (DHABHAR 1932: 438).

It seems obvious that this passage represents an attempt to harmonise the Zurvanite myth with the mainstream Zoroastrian theology. It admits the Zurvanite story of creation, and at the same time it tries to introduce it as a commentary on a traditional statement attributed to Ohrmazd, to the effect that Ohrmazd and Ahunavar are two primordial entities. It does so by identifying Ahunavar with Zurvan, an identification which has no basis other than the wish to read the Zurvanite myth into the *zand*.

³⁸ Already the *Vendidad* has a reference to Zurvan as the framework of creation, where the Pahlavi version interprets this as referring to the creation of water. Cf. *Vd.* 19:9, reproduced in WIDENGREN 1938: 269.

a specific myth of creation according to which the two divine entities sprang forth from Zurvan³⁹.

What is the significance of this discrepancy? The explanation given by the majority of scholars, which assumes the existence of a major heretical sect, suppressed and obliterated at the beginning of the Islamic period without leaving any traces, seems unsatisfactory.

The conclusion we must reach on the basis of the data is that what we have referred to as Zurvanism was never a sect nor a school of thought; but it was merely a fairly inoffensive variant form of the Zoroastrian myth of creation, one of several. There never were any Zurvanite heretics because the adherents of Zurvan as supreme god were simply Zoroastrians. This is how they must have regarded themselves, and it was in this manner that they were regarded by other Zoroastrians. It is possible that the theologians, members of the religious schools, were critical of the myth which gave Zurvan supremacy over both Ohrmazd and Ahreman, but they evidently did not regard this faith as constituting a grave danger to their faith, or as worthy of elaborate refutation. The reason for this may be sought in one of two directions, or possibly in a combination of both:

(a) Faith in Zurvan was not considered to be very important, because it was embraced not by the learned, the theological class, but by people who were theologically untrained, and who could not appreciate the finer distinctions between radical dualism and a dualism which is secondary to the existence of a single unifying principle. In the case of the myth of Zurvan, the primeval unifying principle fades away after the initial phase of the story, leaving the stage to the two main protagonists, and thus its outcome does not tarnish to any appreciable extent the fundamental dualistic view. To support the assertion that the Zurvanite variant of Zoroastrianism was not a religion of theologians we may refer to the rather naive aspect of the creation myth in which Zurvan figures, and to the fact that there was no intellectual development of the Zurvanite belief beyond this crude cosmogony (this applies to some extent also to the treatise *'Ulamâ'-i Islâm*). The fact that kings and members of the royal court may have been among those who believed in the Zurvanite cosmogony does not negate the possibility that it was theologically a naive faith. Kings and aristocrats are not usually trained theologians, and theologians may have been tolerant of deviant non-theological formulations even when they occurred in court circles.

(b) Zoroastrianism was probably much more tolerant of uncanonical views than we are prone to admit. To quote the words of those two perceptive scholars: "L'impression qui se dégage (...) c'est que le magisme ancien formait un ensemble de traditions et de rites

³⁹ The same problem, from the point of view of a scholar who believes in the existence of a Zurvanite sect, is formulated as follows: "In the Sassanian canon of holy writings, the Avesta, it is a priori probable that Zervanite teachings once occupied a prominent place... But in the now extant Avesta we seek in vain for Zervanite texts... This fact must be due to an epuration of the Avesta carried out to remove such doctrines... Pahlavi literature is full of Zervanite texts, though more or less tinged with Zoroastrianism" (WIDENGREN 1969: 179f.).

plutôt qu'un corps de doctrines et que ses prêtres (...) avaient une grande liberté théologique et dissertaient sans contrainte sur la nature de l'être suprême."⁴⁰

It is true that Zoroastrianism carries within it the prophetic message of Zoroaster, which is formulated in sharp and uncompromising terms, and that its own literature bears the mark of single-minded tenacity and fidelity to the principles of its dualistic point of view. There is, however, every reason to believe that deviant views were not always treated harshly or rejected out of hand. In such cases the question is always the borderline between tolerated and acceptable deviations, and those which must cause a rupture and which demand violent expulsion of the antagonists. It is clear that Manichaeism, and in a later period Mazdakism, were movements of this kind, calling for public disavowal and rejection, and there may have been numerous other, perhaps less spectacular, cases in Sasanian history. One only has to recall the frequent admonitions against heretics in Pahlavi literature in order to realize that the problem of heretical sects was acute and painful, at least for the royal court, where responsibility for the administration of the state and for the social cohesion of the population lay⁴¹. It may be taken for granted that the priests were as much concerned about heresy as the court, because it affected their religious control. This is why we have so many passages in the Pahlavi books which deal with the problems of heresy, and give advice on how to recognize it and fight it⁴². Zurvanism is never mentioned in such contexts, or indeed, as we have said, anywhere at all in the Zoroastrian texts.

Since Zurvanism was apparently not considered part of the menace of heresy⁴³, we must assume that it was regarded by its opponents as only mildly deviant, as a myth whose theological and political implications presented no grave danger⁴⁴.

Part of the reason for that may be that people who accepted the Zurvanite myth never sought to unite and form a movement, and thus could not be considered to be endangering the structure or cohesion of society, as did members of other movements that were "properly" heretical. It is thus quite possible that the ideas that may be derived from the myth of Zurvan were condemned by some priests. They might have told their audiences to

⁴⁰ BIDEZ and CUMONT 1938 I: 63.

⁴¹ Cf. SHAKED 1969: 187ff., 214ff.

⁴² Cf. the passage collected and discussed by MOLÉ 1961: 9ff.; SHAKED 1969: 214ff.; 1979: XXXII f.

⁴³ This view was already expressed by SPIEGEL 1873: 184.

⁴⁴ I am unable to share Schaefer's judgement concerning Zurvanism: "Er gehört nicht in die Geschichte des iranischen Glaubens, sondern in die Geschichte des iranischen Unglaubens" (SCHAEFER 1941: 293).

reject the notion that Ohrmazd and Ahreman were brothers, but probably no crusade was ever launched to eradicate this form of belief.

As will be clear to anyone using the Islamic sources carefully, the Zurvanite myth was in all likelihood not the only deviant Iranian version of the cosmogony. Shahrastānī, 'Abd al-Jabbār and other Islamic authorities give us a powerful sense of the great variety of cosmogonic myths among what is called the Majūs. The main versions reported are:

(a) Ohrmazd gave rise to Ahreman as the result of an evil thought that occurred to him. An interesting variant of this myth is that Kayūmarth came into being (as a counterpart to Ahreman) from the perspiration formed on Ohrmazd's forehead from his thought concerning Ahreman⁴⁵. Although the wording is not unequivocal, it seems that the perspiration was caused by the thought that gave rise to Ahreman. If this is correct, a new triad is seen here, similar to the trinity of Zurvan – Ohrmazd – Ahreman. The new triad consists of Ohrmazd – Gayōmard – Ahreman, and places Gayōmard in a position equivalent to Ahreman's on the divine scale⁴⁶.

(b) Ohrmazd and Ahreman both originated from Zurvan.

(c) Ahreman originated from Zurvan, while Ohrmazd is one of the four persons of light (cf. § 7 in Shahrastānī)⁴⁷.

(d) Ohrmazd and Ahreman are two eternal and uncreated principles.

(e) Ohrmazd is eternal, Ahreman is not.

(f) Ohrmazd has material existence, Ahreman does not.

(g) There are three principles: Ohrmazd, Religion and Speech (Shahrastānī, § 24).

(h) God died and left two sons (cf. *Tathbit*, extract II).

This is by no means a complete list of the permutations of the Magian faith as reported by Arabic writers, but it shows how many variations there were on the story of how the two spirits caused the world to be created. One has the impression that none of these versions was so prominent as to be regarded as exclusively correct. There may well have been a specific formulation which was considered by the priests and the learned to represent the

⁴⁵ *wa-yaz'umūna anna mabda'a takawwunihi wa-ḥudūthihi anna yazdān ... afkara fi amri ahriman ... fikratan awjabat an 'araqa jabīnuhu fa-masaḥa al-'araqa wa-ramā bihi fa-sāra minhu kayūmarth* "They claim that the origin of the formation [of Kayūmarth] and his coming into being was that Yazdān ... reflected in the matter of Ahreman a thought which made his forehead sweat. He wiped the perspiration and cast it, and Kayūmarth was formed from it" (Ibn Abī-l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ* I: 104). A similar tradition is in Bīrūnī, *Āthār*, 99: 7. It may be noted that CHRISTENSEN 1918: 16 reads in *Bd.* III: 20 (this corresponds to *GBd* 44; *Zand-ākāsh* 50f.) that Ohrmazd caused perspiration to appear on Gayōmard, but this is a sheer mistranslation of the word for sleep.

⁴⁶ It was the prominence given to Kayūmarth, among other things, that led Schaefer to the conclusion (unjustified, to my mind) that Shahrastānī's account is devoid of any historical value. Cf. REITZENSTEIN and SCHAEFER 1926: 238f. For a characterisation of Shahrastānī's work on the dualists cf. NYBERG 1958: 133.

⁴⁷ References to paragraphs in Shahrastānī and to extracts from 'Abd-al-Jabbār are to the division used in my annotated translation of these texts in a forthcoming article in *JSAI* 16.

"correct" faith, and this may have been the same as that propounded by the Pahlavi books, but there is no certainty about that. As an alternative hypothesis, one may assume that the doctrine familiar to us, which preaches a strict dualism with two independent and nearly symmetrical principles, was one of several doctrines current among the Sasanian priests, and that the ultimate victory of this doctrine was a fairly late historical phenomenon. The texts at our disposal are far from helpful in deciding these questions.

Against the "orthodox" upholders of strict dualism, both mediaeval and modern, it may be pointed out that the Zurvanite myth of origins allows for a more symmetrical representation of the divine world, and at least in this sense constitutes a more radical dualism than that contained in the current Zoroastrian conception of two deities in combat with each other. Zurvan of the myth is a typical *deus otiosus*: he has no function to fulfil after bringing the two antagonistic deities into existence. Fate, if indeed it represents the continued presence of Zurvan in the world, is not an agency of will and decision, but a mechanical and entirely impersonal interference. Christian polemic in Syriac and Armenian against the religion of the Persians, contemporary as it is with the Sasanian dynasty, is mostly a polemic against the Zurvanite myth. This is the clearest evidence that the myth of Zurvan was the most common form of Iranian belief at the time. It went largely out of fashion in the Islamic period, but did not entirely vanish. We still have prominent traces of it in the post-Sasanian period in the form of a myth as well as a theological speculation putting time before Ohrmazd and his demonic rival. The most important documents showing this persistence are the reports of the Islamic historians of religion, and, within Zoroastrianism, the two *'Ulamā'-i Islām* treatises and several references in Pahlavi literature. Logical and attractive as this may look, we really have no evidence to connect fatalism, which is widespread and endemic in Iranian religious life, to the Zurvanite myth specifically. Nor do we have any basis for assuming that the ascetic current in Sasanian Iran, mild as it was, was in any way connected to Zurvan. It consisted mostly in avoiding excesses of wealth and indulgence, in viewing the world as full of dangers and harmful temptations⁴⁸. We certainly cannot declare the occasional negative representation of women or of the demonic female prototype Jeh to be "unorthodox".

Was there a Zurvanite eschatology? Zaehner, for one, thinks that there was: "Zātspram's version [of the eschatological events], as we would expect,

⁴⁸ Cf. SHAKED 1979: xxxiii ff.

shows Zurvanite tendencies. In his account it is Zurvân himself who arms Ahriman with the weapon of Az, concupiscence and greed, who is ultimately to destroy his whole creation, and it is Az, rather than Ahriman, who dominates the whole apocalyptic scene.⁴⁹ Widengren makes much of supposed Zurvanite elements in the apocalyptic literature in Pahlavi⁵⁰. His arguments are typically circular. He devotes considerable space to an analysis of the *Oracles of Hystaspes*, which he takes to be an example of an Iranian apocalyptic work⁵¹. But Flusser has shown⁵² quite plausibly that this is a Jewish composition which used some Iranian motifs. It can hardly be an example of a Zurvanite work of apocalyptic; it seems indeed that this is not even Widengren's contention.

While it is likely, to my mind, that Iranian ideas did have an impact on Judaism⁵³, we would overstep the limits of good historical method if we tried to define those ideas as either "orthodox" or "Zurvanite". As I have endeavoured to show, the term "Zurvanite" has a very limited significance in Iranian religious history: it indicates a myth of creation, and perhaps the tendency to give preponderance to the god Zurvan, but it is impossible to attribute to it a particular body of ethics, ritual, or eschatology⁵⁴. There is certainly no justification to talk of a Zurvanite, as opposed to a Zoroastrian, saviour. Jewish eschatology and apocalyptic may well have borrowed elements from Iran, but it seems futile to look for those elements in a Zurvanite faith which probably never existed.

⁴⁹ ZAEHNER 1961: 311. This is accepted by WIDENGREN 1983: 133.

⁵⁰ In greatest detail in WIDENGREN 1983. The arguments, e.g. on p. 108f., are tenuous. Among other points, the word for "contract", written in Pahlavi *ptm'n*, is claimed by Widengren to be a Parthian form, and he takes MacKenzie to task for transcribing it in the Middle Persian manner. Needless to say, the word exists in both Middle Iranian languages; its Parthian connection, if it were correct, would in any case prove nothing as to its Zurvanite character. The same observation applies to the other word for "pact", *pasht*, also claimed by Widengren, for no good reason, to be Parthian rather than Persian. Similar objections could be raised with regard to the treatment of the word for "disciple", Pahlavi *hâwisht*, which is equally assigned by Widengren (p. 112) to Parthian. For other observations on supposed Zurvanite elements in eschatology cf. WIDENGREN 1972.

⁵¹ WIDENGREN 1983: 121ff.

⁵² Cf. FLUSSER 1982.

⁵³ The latest attempt to put this in doubt, by BARR 1985, is far from convincing. Cf. the balanced treatment of the whole subject by HULTGÅRD 1979.

⁵⁴ That there was no particular Zurvanite eschatology is a conclusion also reached by BOYCE 1990: 25.

References

Note the following abbreviations (others should pose no problem):

JSAI = *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*;

MIDEO = *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire*.

Pahlavi texts are abbreviated as in Shaked 1979.

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FROM IRAN TO ISLAM NOTES ON SOME THEMES IN TRANSMISSION

I. "Religion and Sovereignty are twins" in Ibn al-Muqaffa's theory of * government

It is not easy to summarize the flow of ideas from pre-Islamic Iran into Islamic literature, since we have to do here not with a single encounter, which took place within a limited period of time, but with a fairly extended process of borrowing and adaptation. It certainly began a considerable time before the emergence of Islam, through intercourse between the population of Arabia and the Sasanian empire, and continued with particular vigour during the first two or three centuries of Islam. During this period some of the most conspicuous spokesmen for the new religion were themselves direct descendants of men who had been bearers of the ancient traditions of Iran. Iranian traditions and the Hellenistic and Judaeo-Christian heritage conduct within Islam a kind of internal dialogue in which it is not always easy to distinguish between the parties representing each strain of culture.¹

To the difficulties inherent in this melting-pot situation of Islam one must add complications on two further levels of discussion. First, there are the limitations imposed by the Iranian material, which has only survived in an extremely fragmentary state. So much so, that it is impossible to dispense with the use of Arabic literature itself as one primary source for our acquaintance with Sasanian notions and literary traditions, with the obvious risk of having sometimes to argue in what may look like a vicious circle: from Arabic literature for the Iranian origin of a given theme or topos, and then from that for the Iranian influence in Arabic literature. This situation calls of course for utmost caution and restraint in one's arguments.

The second complication arises out of the open and eclectic character of the Sasanian literary tradition which has left its impact on Islam. The process of borrowing and adaptation, of mutual influences and inter-

¹ The present paper is intended to be the first in a series of similar notes.